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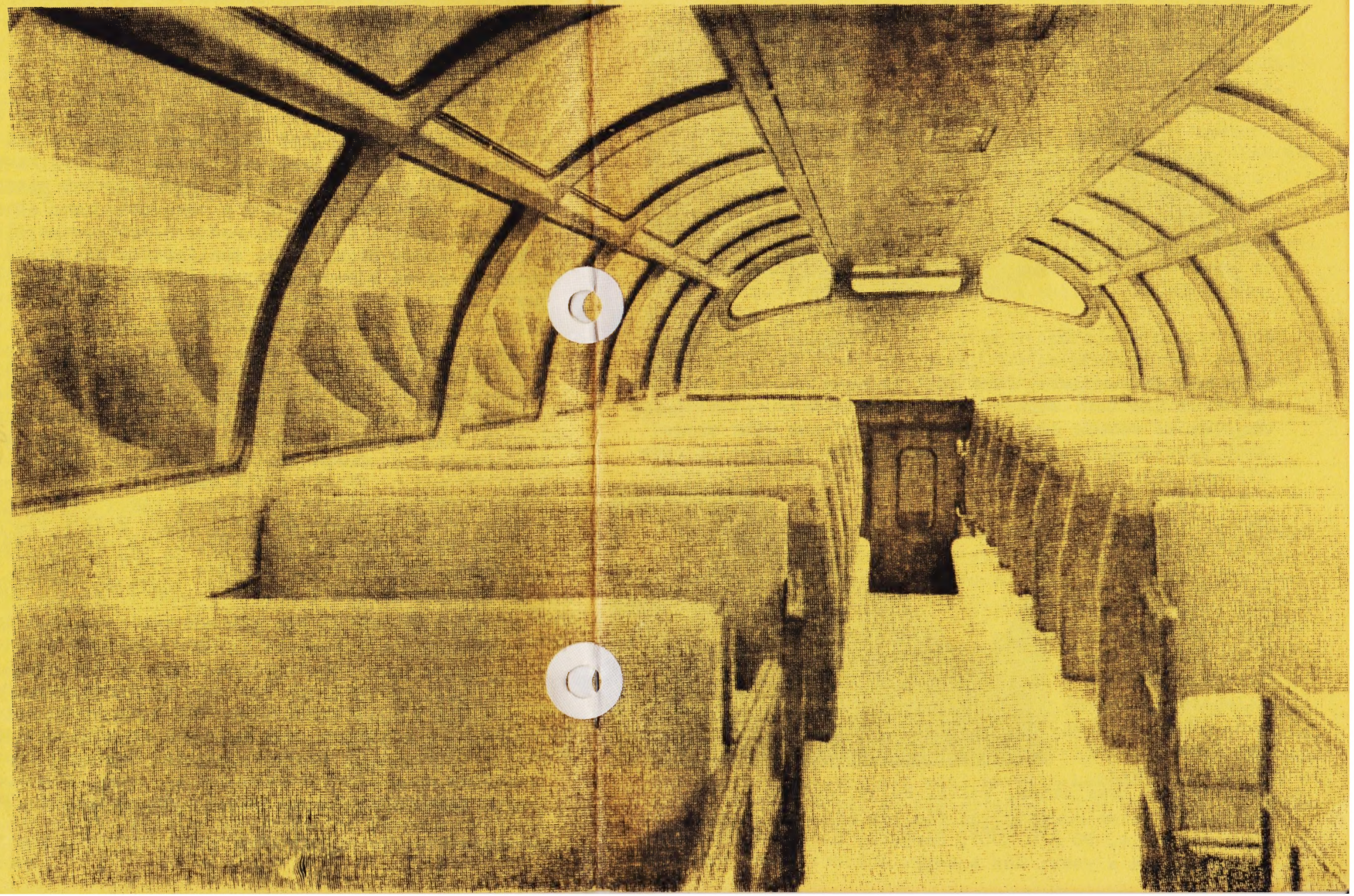
RAIL TRAVEL

Vol. 1 No. 15
July 5, 1971

newsletter



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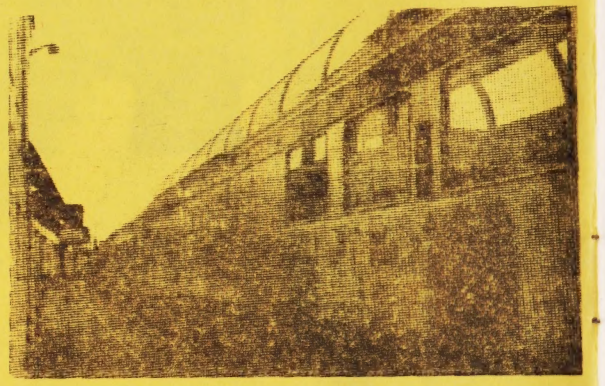
At right, the car pulls into Oakland June 1 on train 99, right on time, following the filming which was done between L.A. and Salinas. The film will be released in December. (More filming was done in other cars in June.)



Rail Travel Newsletter, Vol 1, No 15, July 5, 1971. Published twice monthly, on the 1st and 3rd Mondays, by Message Media, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709 USA. Subscription $4 a year; 25¢ a copy. Editor: James Russell.

LETTERS

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This letter reflects anger on your service, but I still think Rail Travel Newsletter is the best passenger train magazine to appear.

Michael J. Martino

Staten Island, N.Y.

(Please accept our personal apologies, Mr. Martino, for our slowness in sending out back issues requested. And to all our other readers with similar complaints, if you didn't see the note in the last issue, please bear with us. Our tiny staff has been snowed under by the volume of correspondence that's mounting, and with the large number of orders for back issues, some have been depleted so that we have made arrangements to reprint some early issues so your orders will be complete. If you're awaiting a back issue order, and your check has already been cashed, no doubt your order is held up awaiting completion of reprinting of these issues. Please don't despair. We hope to have our backlog of orders in the mail by the time you read this.

Also, our apologies to letter writers who should have expected a personal response. We carefully read every letter we receive, but have fallen far behind in answering some. It was either that or fall behind in production of this newsletter, so we had to choose the former. But don't stop writing--we greatly appreciate all your thoughtful communications. - The Editor.)

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IF YOU RECEIVE this issue as part of a regular subscription, you will notice it is stamped with a special small-sized commemorative stamp issued July 1, honoring the beginning of operation of the U. S. Postal Service, now an "independent establishment" of the government. It succeeds the Post Office Dept., created July 26, 1775, and promises improved service along with a balanced budget.

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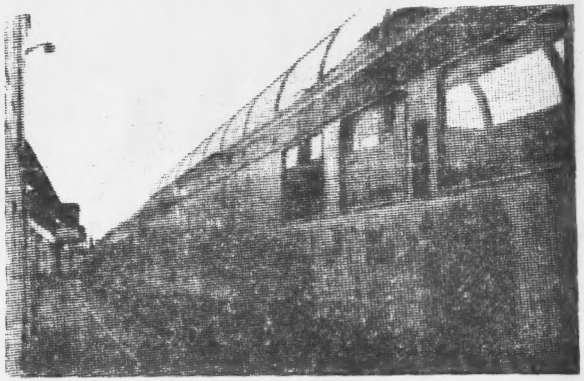

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AMTRAK CALLED A SUCCESS

The nation's new railroad passenger system seems to be a success, according to the Utah Governor's Office of Community Affairs. Its director, William G. Bruhn, told this to a labor group in Utah at the end of June, according to the Ogden Standard-Examiner. He said Amtrak's prospects of future expansion are "fairly good." At the same meeting, George W. Black, a Utah spokesman for the United Transportation Union, lamented the passing of the City of Los Angeles train run from L.A. through Utah until the 1st of May. Mr. Bruhn said the Governor is closely watching the advent of Amtrak and other changes in the transportation industry.

AMTRAK APOLOGIZES FOR ITS FIRST SCHEDULE

An Amtrak spokesman, in response to a New York Times query (June 27) after a reader complained he could not obtain train schedules, apologized for the fact that only 100,000 nationwide schedules were printed. These, he said, were "quickly snapped up all across the country." He pointed out that individual railroads still have their own schedules available. But reader William Olcott complained that at least twice a week since late April he had asked at both Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal for schedules of trains running west of Chicago and New Orleans and could obtain none. He commented, "One wonders how many persons who enjoy rail travel have switched to other transportation because Amtrak has distributed no schedules during this May-June period when people usually 'firm up' their summer vacation plans." The Amtrak spokesman said the second nationwide schedule "should be available the first week in July", although earlier Amtrak had told RTN it would be published July 12.

ANOTHER NATIONWIDE RAIL STRIKE THREATENS

On July 16 at 6am, the United Transportation Union will strike the Union Pacific, Southern, and Chicago & North Western railroads, it says. On July 7, bargaining sessions will resume, but the two sides are reportedly far apart on the question of ending crew changes about every 100 miles and establishing regular inter-divisional runs. It has been speculated that Congress will have to intervene, as it did in the walkout last December 10.

A BRITISH RAIL DISASTER

The derailment of an excursion train full of children near Chester July 2 killed at least two children and injured an indeterminate number of others. Passengers were trapped in overturned cars.

CALL FOR CHANGES IN AMTRAK OPERATIONS

Rail travel critic Paul Rayton is of course familiar to readers of this newsletter. The transportation consultant-writer-filmmaker, who travels thousands of miles each year on American railroads alone, called upon Amtrak June 27 to make a number of changes--most of them relatively simple ones--to make life easier for the rail traveler and to stimulate more use of trains.

Noting that Amtrak has asked for suggestions from the train-riding public, Mr. Rayton presented seven suggestions, largely concerning service in his home area, populous Los Angeles. Here are his main points:

1) Adjust the schedules of the eastbound GEORGE WASHINGTON and JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY so that travelers from Chicago to Washington D.C. or Virginia do not have a layover of nearly a full day in Cincinnati.

2) The SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS now leaves Kansas City at 5:30 am, but the eastbound SUPER CHIEF arrives there just twenty minutes later. In order to continue through to the East Coast, there is a day-long layover at this point.

3) Schedule the northbound COAST DAYLIGHT to leave L.A. a bit earlier than 10:15am so that a one-day round trip to San Luis Obispo and return is possible.

Rayton elaborated on this point: "The route from L.A. to San Luis Obispo is one of the most scenic in the nation, and it crosses country that is completely inacessible by auto. Further, it possesses vast amounts of unspoiled seascape--a fast-disappearing commodity in this state." He suggested this round trip as "a natural for your 'promotional' purposes, for semi-excursion outings on the rails."

4) Put the dome car back on the COAST DAYLIGHT route (this has been a major bone of contention with California travelers ever since Amtrak downgraded this train by eliminating the traditional dome).

Rayton commented: "The scenery along the California coastline is a prime drawing-card for any prospective travelers in the state... Therefore, utilization of dome cars on this route is an absolute must. According to my clearance specifications (supplied by S.P.) there is ample clearance on the coast route to accomodate any dome cars now in service. Their restricted clearance tunnels are over Donner Pass--and possibly in the more northern part of California. Thus, it would seem advantageous to add a dome car to the consist at the earliest opportunity--even if you can only run it between Los Angeles/San Diego and Oakland."

5) Add a stop at Glendale and a flag stop at Surf, both on the COAST DAYLIGHT route.

These were among stops eliminated by Amtrak. Glendale is more convenient to the 2 million people living in the San Fernando Valley area than is the downtown L.A. station. It also had the advantage of trackside parking, a boon to people with difficulty walking the long tunnels and steep ramps of L.A.'s Union Station. Said Rayton: "It was far more convenient for many people who never go down into the central city anymore, particularly elderly people..." and "you stand a good chance of alienating your potential users if you make the product too hard to get to. One major complaint about airports these days is that they are always far on the outskirts of the city and you always have to drive so far to get to them."

6) If Amtrak decides to close the L.A. Union Station, the Glendale station might suffice.

7) Re-route the SUNSET between L.A. and the San Bernardino area to use Santa Fe tracks. "It seems rather uneconomic to be maintaining two stations in Pomona, and two serving the Pasadena/Alhambra area. The Santa Fe stations serving those areas are clean and well-kept; the possible extra stop in San Bernardino shouldn't hurt SUNSET business. Granted there might have to be a little track work done out in San Bernardino to facilitate such a routing, but I think the savings would outweigh the costs."

GEORGE WASHINGTON TO RUN THROUGH TO CHICAGO

Stephen Farrar, who writes monthly passenger train news for the Richmond VA chapter of NRHS (in its publication, the "Highball,") reports that effective with the July 12 publication of the 2nd Amtrak schedule, the GEORGE WASHINGTON on the C&O will run through from Newport News, VA to Chicago. It currently terminates in Cincinnati. He says "Westbound, there will be little schedule change. I understand, however, that eastbound the train will operate somewhat on the schedule of the RILEY and then will leave Cincinnati 11:40pm, arriving Richmond about 12:40pm, Newport News about 2:25pm."

BIKE TRAINS PROVE POPULAR ON EAST COAST

The story of riding a bike-train from Riverhead, L.I. to Greenport is told by Alan Fortney in the N.Y. Times (Jun.27). Five 4-week bike trips will start in July, with train from N.Y. to Montreal, biking along Lake Champlain across New England to Nantucket & Martha's Vineyard. See the Times Travel Section for more details.

STOP PRESSES: LATE NEWS --

Over 500,000 copies of the 2nd Amtrak schedule are now being distributed nationwide to ticket offices and travel agencies, and should be available by July 12.

Changes in the 32-page timetable include these:

* Daily service Chicago-N.Y. via Toledo, Cleveland, Buffalo and Albany.
* Daily Boston-N.Y. trains via Worcester & Springfield.
* Experimental tri-weekly NORTH COAST LIMITED service.
* Through train Chicago-Norfolk, Va., by Cincinnati and West Virginia.
* Through service Chicago-Miami & St. Petersburg via Indianapolis & Louisville.
* Morning and afternoon departures each way between Chicago and Detroit.
* Chicago arrival from Carbondale, Ill. moved up to 10:15am, more convenient for businessmen.
* Milwaukee-Chicago train 12 rescheduled to connect with the Chicago-Cleveland-Buffalo train.
* Super Chief eastbound connection can now be made with the Spirit of St. Louis.
* Trains westbound from Norfolk & Cincinnati will connect at Indianapolis with trains to St. Louis & Kansis City.
* Free taxi service between stations in Chicago.

MORE ON THE STATE-SUBSIDIZED NORTHEAST CORRIDOR TRAIN

We reported May 17 (RTN#12) that a new run from Boston to New York & Washington via Worcester & Springfield was to begin May 17, but was delayed by the rail strike that day. Details now come via THE CALLBOY, bulletin of The Railroad Enthusiasts Inc., New England Div. (PO Box 3, Methuen, Mass. 01844): The first run was made May 20; consist is 2 coaches and a parlor-tray car. "Lvs South Station 7:01am; Framingham 7:35; Worcester 8:03; Springfield 9:06; Hartford 9:18; New Haven 10:37, cars attached to Train 171, ar. Philadelphia 2:22pm. Returning, leave Philadelphia on Train 174 4:00pm; arr. New Haven 7:34, cars detached, lv. 7:55; arr. Hartford 8:52; Springfield 9:26; Worcester 10:42; Framingham 11:09, So. Station 11:45.

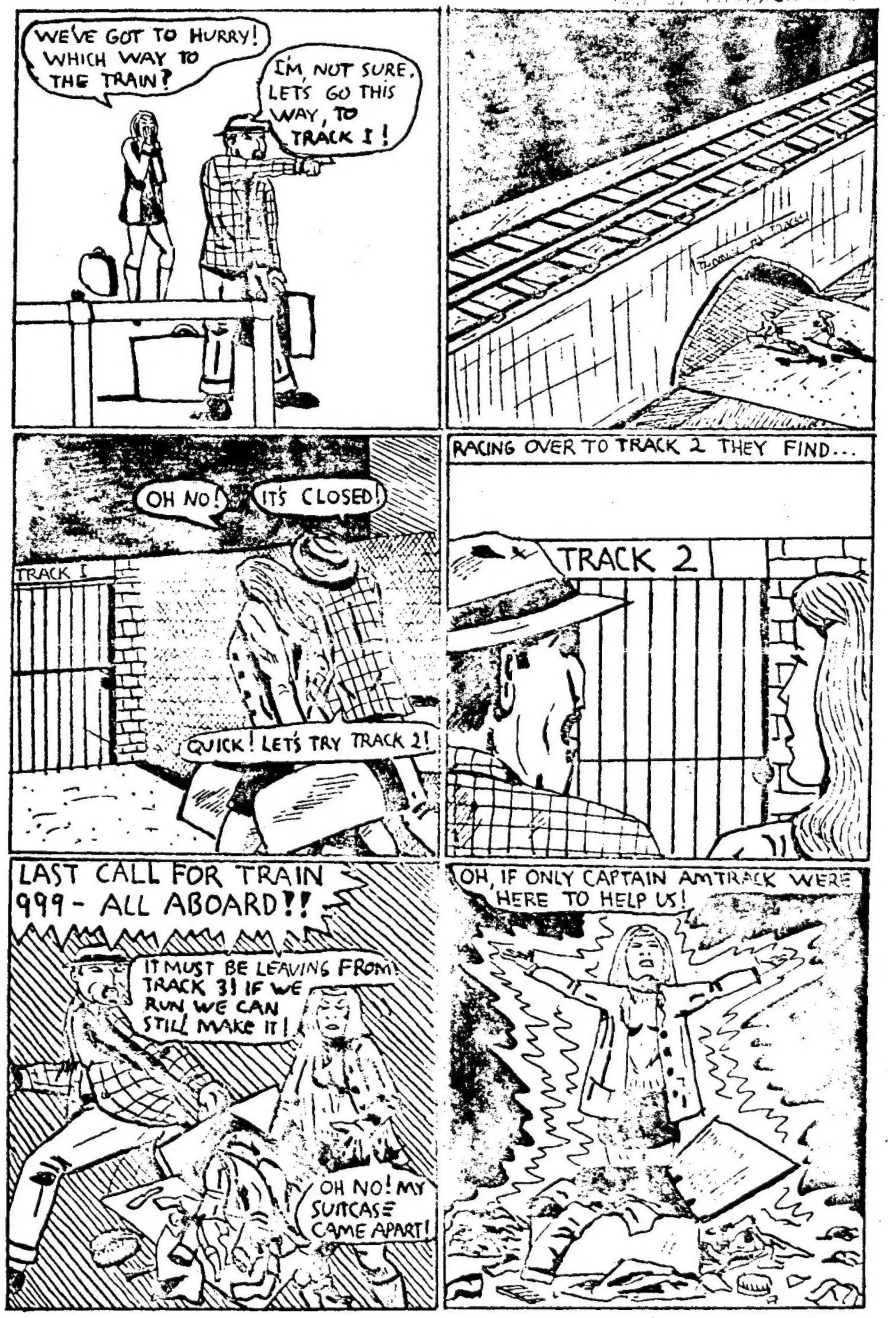
RAILFAN APPEARS IN TOP-RATED CRIME DRAMA FILM

Richard B. Shull, appearing in the Columbia Picture, "The Anderson Tapes" with Sean Connery and Dyan Cannon, is an avid train enthusiast and a frequent contributor to Rail Travel Newsletter. The film has received rave reviews from a number of important critics.

CAPTAIN AMTRACK

PAGE 8

ART BY MICHAEL COHEN



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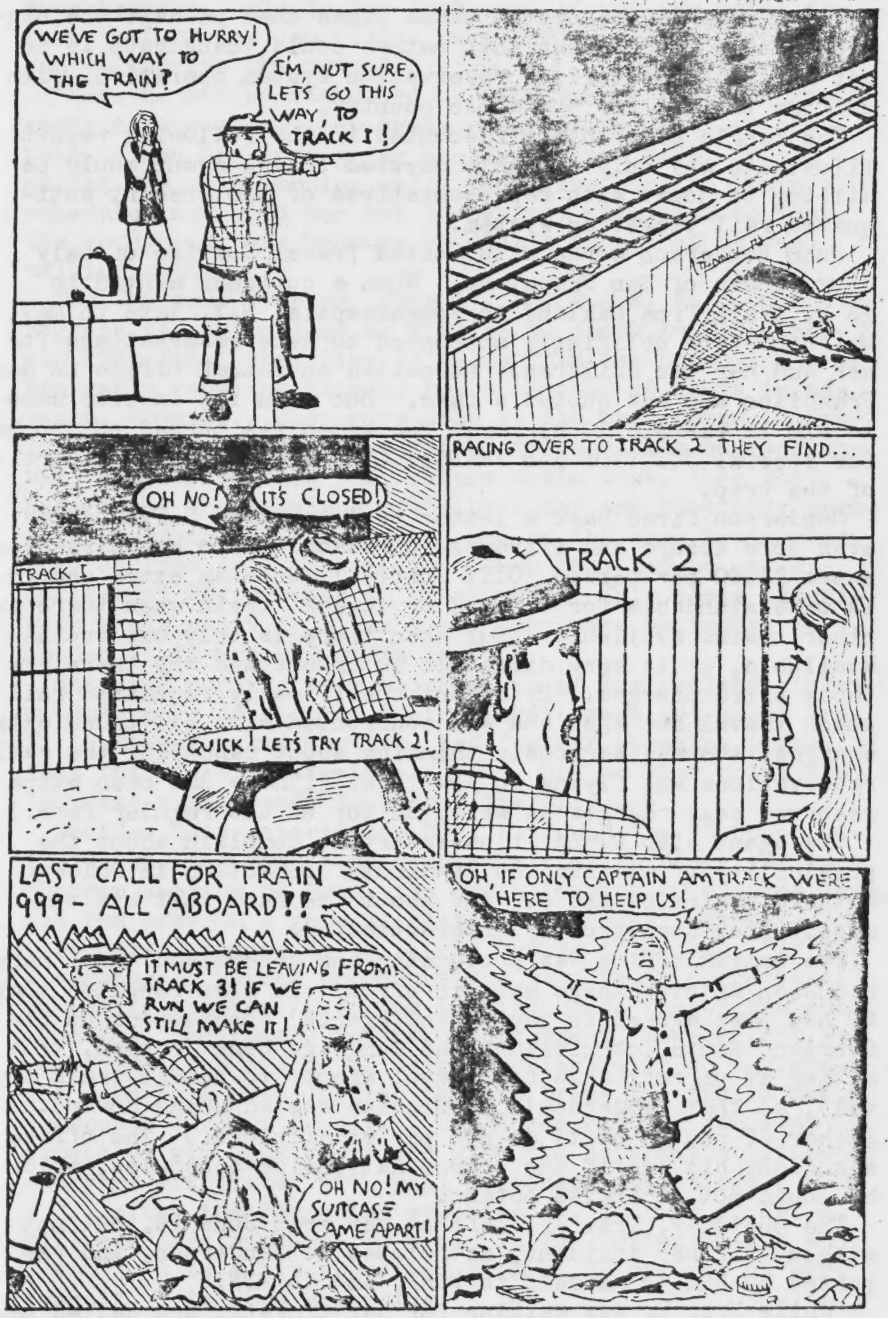

THE CASE OF THE TROUBLED TRAVEL AGENT

We've remarked before in these pages that perhaps the biggest single improvement that Amtrak could inaugurate is to get a fast, computerized reservation system operative, with uniform tariffs for the whole country.

The tangle of problems recounted in the following report illustrate why only a highly devoted travel agent would be willing to joust with representatives of the present antiquated rail ticketing system.

John Henderson works with United Travel Service of Daly City, south of San Francisco. When a customer wanted to go by train from Oakland to Poughkeepsie, N.Y. late in May, Mr. Henderson obligingly attempted to make reservations for her and her two children. He called an Amtrak office in San Francisco and was quoted a fare. But when the invoice came to him it was $15.10 higher. The added fee turned out to be for special "CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO" charges on the SP portion of the trip.

Henderson fired back a letter to Amtrack in S.F.: "It is even more absurd and extremely unreasonable to be charged an extra $5.00 per person 'CITY Charge.' Such an extra charge is understandable for a named or 'crack' train when there are other trains available. But when there is only one train available, it is very difficult to understand why there are those extra charges. My client specifically requested rail coach travel but when she was confronted with all those extra charges, she was seriously thinking about canceling the rail reservations and flying to New York." (There had been extra reserved seat charges as well, on top of the regular fare.)

The agent also found it necessary to complain about the possibility of missing the 20-minute connection in Chicago with PC trains 68 and 69, and about the fact that his commission had been grossly underestimated.

The Amtrak office was apologetic and determined that there had been an overcharge made in error. It also reported that SP had just agreed to pay travel agents' commissions on its Overland Route (commissions had long ago been dropped, thus making it unprofitable for travel agents to handle train traval), so that Henderson's commission was adjusted upward. (Other SP routes still do not pay commissions.) The office also sent him one of the scarce nationwide schedules, which he could not otherwise obtain.

The customer, Mrs. K., left on her trip June 19, but not without further incident, as related to Henderson, and reported by him to Amtrak, to NARP, and to RTN:

"While Mrs. K. was waiting for her tickets, she called Amtrak and asked for the schedule to Poughkeepsie. A young man

answered the phone and told her: 'There is no train to Poughkeepsie, only to New York, and if you are going to take that train, you better take two bottles of wine with you to survive the ordeal.'

"Mrs. K. was so disturbed by that remark that she was ready to cancel all her train reservations but her husband talked her into going ahead with the trip. So she called the next morning and a lady gave her the train schedules and told her not to pay any attention to what the young man said because he didn't know what he was talking about.

"On Thursday evening, June 17, Mr. & Mrs. K. took their baggage to the Oakland SP station to check to Poughkeepsie (Ed. Note: they live 17 miles from the depot). The SP timetable requires baggage to be checked 24 hours in advance. However...they were told by the baggageman in Oakland that they could have waited to check the baggage until Saturday morning just before train time, that they had missed the previous train by a day and that they probably would not have their baggage on the same train when they arrived in Poughkeepsie. Then they had to pay an additional 25¢ per bag to check them. This whole experience again upset my clients and they were beginning to wonder if it was all worth it."

Saturday morning they checked in at the Oakland ticket window, only to be told their tickets were not good! Mrs. K. in dismay asked why not, and further checking proved that the tickets were indeed good, but at that point the lady was again ready to cancel the trip.

Besides this experience, Mrs. K. found the BN coach dilapidated, the rest room tiny, the station dingy and in a rundown section of town, the train leaving 20 minutes late, and the crew in a general state of disorganization.

Henderson summed it up in his letter to Amtrak: "If the foregoing is normal procedure for your train operations, Amtrak is apparently trying to discourage passengers much more than the former railroad management. However, it appears that you are still using regular railroad employees who seem to know no better than to treat the public and customers discourteously. I don't see how you can ever expect to win back customers with the apparent attitude of everyone affiliated with rail passenger operations.

"...after the foregoing experiences, I doubt if Mr. K. will ever again travel by train in the United States and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Mrs. K. returns by air, even if it is more expensive."

COMMUTING AND RAPID TRANSIT

READER'S DIGEST Praises BART

A 4-page article in the READER'S DIGEST (July) presents a glowing description of the "almost ready" Bay Area Rapid Transit system. Quote: "Encouraging news for commuters everywhere, (BART) is such a promising preview of what mass transit can be that it is likely to be copied by other traffic-choked cities. Already, transportation experts from Washington, and foreign nations as well, are watching with interest as BART undergoes its final trials."

Encouraging talk, but one hopes that other cities will not have to endure the political connivings and hurdles that the pioneer BART system encountered, and that set it behind schedule by several years.

BART Won't Buy Toronto Streetcars for S.F.

Next Spring BART will begin construction on upper Market St., San Francisco, requiring removal or re-routing of some S.F. Muni streetcars. The Muni decided upon the re-routing, and asked BART to pay for 10 second-hand trolleys from Toronto at $2000 apiece, that would be needed to maintain commuter flow over the lengthy detour. BART refused to do so, and the matter is up in the air. BART is already paying the costs of constructing the detour. The 20-year old streetcars in question are similar to the 105 cars now in operation in San Francisco.

Prototype BART Cars Still Having Problems

Initial car production for BART is currently at least six months behind schedule, and a meeting of BART and the Rohr Corporation July 6 is expected to reveal further delays. Rohr, builder of the new transit cars, has delivered nine of the planned ten hand-built prototypes, but BART has criticized them on several points. The last should be delivered soon, and BART is optimistic that this one will be up to snuff. The cars are required to weigh about 60,000 pounds, making them the lightest transit cars for their size in North America.

Judge Halts Construction of New Bay Area Freeway

A U.S. District Court judge July 2 ordered land acquisition stopped until Sept. 21 for a controversial Interstate highway connection in Hayward, Calif. The suit was brought against Volpe, the State Highway Commission, and others by the Sierra Club and 3 Chicano groups representing residents whose community would be destroyed.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"We want to do all we can to make this program a success, and will need the help of all the Southern Pacific family. It will be mutually beneficial to employes and the Company to operate a first-class service. In order to accomplish this, we will require the efforts and cooperation of all employes. The principal ingredients of outstanding service are friendliness, courtesy at all times, and neat and presentable appearance; and nothing less will be accepted.

...The routes selected by NRPC are designed to determine strength of public demand for passenger service. Success will be dependent upon the people, in direct contact with the public, who operate the system. It is, therefore, incumbent on all of us to put forth extra effort to provide efficient and courteous service so that the Amtrak system may be given every chance to become a successful operation."

--S.P. instructions to personnel concerning Amtrak, April 27.

"Amtrak, moving through its second month, is encouraged by its beginning but knows it has 'miles and miles to go' if it hopes to revitalize America's rail passenger service. ...

The corporation receives 'morning reports' on the trains in its system. 'But all we really know from these reports so far,' the Amtrak official said, 'is that about 85% of our trains are consistently running on time.'"

--UTU Transportation News, June 19

EDITORIAL: THE DEADLY HIGHWAY NUMBERS GAME

This Independence Day weekend, between 520 and 620 persons will be killed in traffic accidents, estimates the National Safety Council (in the 78 hours from 6pm Friday to midnight Monday). The last 3-day weekend, 553 died.

This periodic counting of auto fatalities over holidays seems to do little to diminish the slaughter, and indeed may be counter-productive, since it implies that the blame for these needless deaths falls upon the happenstance of a holiday occurring, and upon holiday drivers. The fact is that holiday death rates are not different from ordinary weekend statistics. The real culprit is the automobile and our almost total dependence upon it.

The rich and powerful oil-highway-motel complex is not interested in really resolving the problem of highway inhumanity. Instead, half-truths are mouthed, bolstered by dubious statistics hiding the truth of the world's worst rate of killing.

SACRAMENTO - STATION OR MUSEUM?

By George Hyko

Here in the huge Amtrak-Southern Pacific depot in the California capital the air is like a museum. One full-width wall carries an enormous mural depicting the breaking of ground for the start of construction of the first transcontinental railroad, January 8, 1863. An adjoining wal has a metal plaque with a guide to the figures shown in the mural--Stanford, Huntington, Judah, they're all there.

Among the few people wandering about are a steady trickle of out-of-state tourists who gaze at this monument to a way of travel from a bygone day that Amtrak is now commissioned to revive. Half the room serves as a waiting room for SP's employment office.

We're awaiting the train back to Oakland; two or three others are doing likewise. The taxi driver had a hard time finding the building. No sign anywhere indicates that trains are hereabouts. Every Southern Pacific sign that could be removed has been removed. They couldn't get the etched SP emblems out of the wood bench ends, tho.

The only Amtrak sign on the exterior is one tiny hand-drawn arrow above a typewriter sheet of office hours on one door. In front, an ominous row of "no parking" signs urge you off.

Actually, this depot is closer to "midtown" than most. It's walking distance to the capital with its fine surrounding park and many other interesting buildings. A new shopping mall with a simulated cable car from the city bus line to move tired pedestrians about is a short distance away. It's also just a few blocks to the Greyhound depot where long lines form to go places the train can take you to in more comfort for pennies more.

The train pulls in, an announcement comes on. Can't tell if it's exactly on time; nowhere can I locate an arrival time. The moment it comes, a switch engine waiting in the wings pulls up to block it from our view. We must go thru dingy tunnels to track 6 (for the only train to come thru today!), down and up ramps to reach it.

Yes, someone has done his best to hide the train from public view. And in a spot with tremendous potential for short-haul traffic to and from the Bay Area. I'm reminded of how well Canadian National spruced up its similar depot in Vancouver to give the traveler a feeling of welcome. We're almost glad to leave this mausoleum to rail travel.

Right out of the station we cross the Sacramento River and soon are merrily flying thru fields of safflowers and silage corn.

Express Ads

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TRAVEL

THOSE EUROPEAN TRAINS are something else! You know all about EURAILPASS--good in 13 countries, unlimited first class over 100,000 rail miles. But did you know you can buy one right now by mailing your check & passport number to: Jean Maxwell, Box 4, c/o this newsletter. Pass becomes active first day used. $110 3 weeks; $140 1 mo.; $200 2 mos.; $230 3 mos. (half-fare ages 4-10). Must be purchased in U.S. Write now! (Phone no. 415-343-1073).

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Here in the huge Amtrak-Southern Pacific depot in the California capital the air is like a museum. One full-width wall carries an enormous mural depicting the breaking of ground for the start of construction of the first transcontinental railroad, January 8, 1863. An adjoining wal has a metal plaque with a guide to the figures shown in the mural--Stanford, Huntington, Judah, they're all there.

Among the few people wandering about are a steady trickle of out-of-state tourists who gaze at this monument to a way of travel from a bygone day that Amtrak is now commissioned to revive. Half the room serves as a waiting room for SP's employment office.

We're awaiting the train back to Oakland; two or three others are doing likewise. The taxi driver had a hard time finding the building. No sign anywhere indicates that trains are hereabouts. Every Southern Pacific sign that could be removed has been removed. They couldn't get the etched SP emblems out of the wood bench ends, tho.

The only Amtrak sign on the exterior is one tiny hand-drawn arrow above a typewriter sheet of office hours on one door. In front, an ominous row of "no parking" signs urge you off.

Actually, this depot is closer to "midtown" than most. It's walking distance to the capital with its fine surrounding park and many other interesting buildings. A new shopping mall with a simulated cable car from the city bus line to move tired pedestrians about is a short distance away. It's also just a few blocks to the Greyhound depot where long lines form to go places the train can take you to in more comfort for pennies more.

The train pulls in, an announcement comes on. Can't tell if it's exactly on time; nowhere can I locate an arrival time. The moment it comes, a switch engine waiting in the wings pulls up to block it from our view. We must go thru dingy tunnels to track 6 (for the only train to come thru today!), down and up ramps to reach it.

Yes, someone has done his best to hide the train from public view. And in a spot with tremendous potential for short-haul traffic to and from the Bay Area. I'm reminded of how well Canadian National spruced up its similar depot in Vancouver to give the traveler a feeling of welcome. We're almost glad to leave this mausoleum to rail travel.

Right out of the station we cross the Sacramento River and soon are merrily flying thru fields of safflowers and silage corn.

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